

Abstract

Thesis Title: The International Student Experience: An Auto-Ethnographic Study of International Students at Ball State University

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This is an auto-ethnographic study of international students at Ball State University, a medium-sized, state-supported institution in the Midwestern United States. I drew on my own personal experience, in-depth interviews with fifteen other international students, and participant observations carried out over a period of one year to understand how international students experienced life at this university. I used Social Identity Theory and the Rejection-Identification Model to explain why international students formed a tight-knit community, despite coming from a wide array of cultural backgrounds. Participants' narratives illustrated international students' experiences of rejection by American students, faculty, and staff; their feelings of devaluation, expressed as self-doubt and a tendency to overreact to life pressures; and the existence of a strong international student minority group identity. In view of the University's strategic goal to substantially increase international enrollments, I offer recommendations on how this institution can promote a more welcoming, multicultural campus environment.